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Myriam P. Sarachik
President, American Physical Society
Department of Physics, CCNY-CUNY
Convent Avenue and 138th Street
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17 March 2003

Dear Myriam Sarachik,

After a long investigation — the most detailed to date by scientists — an IEEE human rights committee has issued a disturbing report on the dismissal of physicist Jeff Schmidt by the American Institute of Physics. As you know, Jeff was fired after 19 years at *Physics Today* magazine, upon publication of his book, *Disciplined Minds*.

The IEEE committee joins a long list of individuals and organizations that have publicly condemned AIP's action as suppression of dissent within the physics community. Among the 800 scientists and other scholars who have gone on record against AIP's repressive behavior are more than 500 physicists, mostly APS members — the largest number of physicists ever to speak out on a freedom-of-expression issue in the United States.

In one of the scores of protest letters, APS member Al McInturff notes that if we fail to take a stand against suppression of dissent, then “by our silence we concur.” This is especially true when the repression is carried out in our name, as it was in this case, because the American Physical Society is the leading organization that governs the American Institute of Physics. APS cannot say, “We aren't responsible for AIP's behavior.”

The 500 APS members who are objecting to Jeff's firing would, of course, like their Council to be responsive to their concerns. On their behalf, we ask you to raise the issue formally with the APS Council, of which you are a member. Specifically, we request that the Council hold an on-the-record discussion of the issue and take the following action:

1. Call publicly for Jeff's reinstatement.
2. Instruct the APS representatives on the AIP Governing Board to press for Jeff's reinstatement.

To date, there has been no serious investigation of Jeff's case by any APS official, as evidenced by the simple fact that no one from APS has ever contacted Jeff to give him the opportunity to address whatever issues APS deems decisive in the case.

When we looked into Jeff's dismissal ourselves, we concluded that it was a clear case of suppression of dissent — a reprisal for Jeff's critical research and writing about physics education and professional careers, and in particular for his views on workplace practices and working conditions at *Physics Today*. A revealing statement by AIP CEO Marc Brodsky, prompted by protests against Jeff's firing, confirmed for us that we hadn't missed any significant facts when we assessed the matter.

While at *Physics Today*, Jeff consistently completed his work far ahead of deadline, invariably received job performance ratings of “Meets job requirements” or “Exceeds job requirements,” and was widely praised for the quality of his work. The evidence indicates that Jeff would still be employed by *Physics Today*, just as he had been for 19 years, if he had not been a workplace activist and if he had written but not published *Disciplined Minds*. As far as we know, no AIP manager has disputed this,

either publicly or privately. Therefore, we conclude that Jeff was fired for expressing critical views within the physics community. Ironically, reviewers have treated his book as a valuable contribution. (See, for example, the review in the APS Forum publication, *Physics and Society*, July 2002, and the author interview in the APS Division of Biological Physics publication, *The Biological Physicist*, October 2001.)

Jeff's treatment like a heretic reflects poorly on our organization and undermines the science community's efforts to be seen by the public as open-minded. We would like to work with you to make sure that the next round of publicity in this case is positive — based on a clear demonstration by APS that physicists will not tolerate the exclusion of critical views from debate within the physics community. We are sure that you, as a fellow physicist, share our high expectations for our organization.

Jeff has not taken his dismissal to court, preferring first to give individuals and organizations such as APS the opportunity to speak out publicly for justice. Forgoing this opportunity would take the matter out of the hands of the physics community and would likely put APS in the awkward position of co-defendant. (When Jeff was fired, he was banned from APS headquarters as well as AIP headquarters, being told never to reenter the American Center for Physics “at any time, for any reason.”) What would APS's lawyers say? “Firing Jeff was perfectly legal”? “It's all AIP's fault”?

APS is known for speaking out when scientists in other countries suffer reprisals for expressing their views. We must not give repressive foreign authorities the opportunity to question our credibility and dismiss our protests as hypocritical because we are silent about repression within our own organizations.

We will, of course, report the Council's response in this case to the hundreds of concerned APS members, physics graduate students, and people outside of physics who have been following the case with great interest. Thus, this is not only an opportunity to do something for justice close to home, but also an opportunity for APS leaders to build their reputation among both physicists and human rights activists.

Enclosed is a copy of the human rights committee report mentioned above. Marc Brodsky's statement to the committee (and to others) is posted on the web at <http://disciplinedminds.com>. We asked Jeff if he had any testimonial evidence from physicists that he did good work at *Physics Today*, and a copy of what he sent us in response is enclosed. We thought you would also appreciate the perspective of the enclosed article from *Physics World* magazine.

We would appreciate hearing your views. Please feel free to contact any of us — our addresses and telephone numbers are at the top of this letter. We would, of course, be happy to provide additional information. We have written to other members of the Council to ask their views, too. Please feel free, as well, to contact Jeff directly, at 202-537-3645 or jeffschmidt@alumni.uci.edu.

Best regards,



For Talat Rahman, Michael A. Lee, George F. Reiter, Denis G. Rancourt, and Fay Dowker